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AUTHOR Sebberson, David
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ABSTRACT

The belief that writing can best be understood by understanding the mental processes that govern the production of discourse is questioned in this paper. Plato and Aristotle can form a theoretical base for rhetoric praxis that is democratic, diverse, and empowering. A reexamination of Plato's language underscores his belief that a person must know various states of mind and plans of action to achieve reason and understanding, but Plato is not describing the manner by which an individual thinks and feels; rather is he examining how humans arrive practically at critical judgments about the world of human affairs. Aristotle too, conceives psychology in clinical terms. The soul is to be led to a place of understanding, where judgement and action are guided by politics and ethics. Hence the rhetorician must consider how emotions affect judgment. Eighteenth-century rhetorician George Campbell's psychology turned inward, leaving the world of human action for the realm of the mind and psychological behavior. Contemporary compositionalist practices, like Campbell's approach, focus upon internal processes. The writing classroom should be reconceived as a scene of cultural engagement. Students can be taught to inquire in the Aristotelean mode about how a world of powerful discourses operates to shape them. Like Plato, students can come to realize that such questions do not come easily in a democracy and they can learn to be critical. Such critical engagement can only make sense if the presumption of psychology and the tyranny of process are abandoned. (Twenty-one references are attached.) (SG)

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From Rhetorical Action to Compositionalist Behavior: Reconsidering the Tyranny of Process

David Sebberson, Ph.D.
Department of English
St. Cloud State University

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Today I would like to question the tyranny of the writing process by undermining its theoretical power base, psychology. Specifically, I wish to question the belief that we can best understand writing if we come to understand the mental behavior whose processes govern the production of discourse, processes that can be identified, analyzed, managed, developed. I wish to question as desirable even those complex and potentially rich assumptions that would not "simply [borrow] knowledge from psychology. . . . [but rather] define a psychology of composition as a disciplinary structure with its own integrity" (Phelps in Moran and Lunsford, 27). I wish to question the simple assertion of Louise Wetherbee Phelps, who in considering the phrase "psychology of composition" states, categorically, that "The problem is not categorical but conceptual: we must discover what we are

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looking for." Today, I wish to think about category as well as concept, and I wish to do such thinking at once historically and critically.

"Psychology" is nothing if not a ubiquitous term that has informed theories of rhetoric and composition since Plato, who set the stage early--"a rhetorician must know the various forms of psyche"--and Aristotle, whose Rhetoric has been referred to as an early manual of applied psychology (see, for example, Barilli, 13). In the 18th century George Campbell set out to "draw a map of the human mind" and conceived The Philosophy of Rhetoric in terms of the new science, psychology. But we need to juxtapose notions of psychology grounded in enlightenment ideals of manipulation and control against notions of psychology grounded in Classical aims of justice and action. For such juxtaposition enables us to see the radical disjunctions between political action and psychological behavior smoothed over by the term "psychology" and reified in the tyranny of "process." Through such juxtaposition, we can recategorize and reconceptualize writing not in terms of mental behavior but rather in terms of ethical and political action.

At this point I wish to read briefly but intensely some Plato, Aristotle and Campbell, and in such reading I hope to turn those texts upon their heads--or at least typical readings of those texts--and at the same time disrupt some current-conventional wisdom: Plato and Aristotle can form a theoretical base for rhetorical praxis that is democratic, diverse, and empowering.

Plato

For Plato the concern for psyche is the concern for developing the critical capabilities of mindfulness insofar as those capabilities are used to

arrive at ethical and political judgment. Plato's logoi or accounts of psyche--i.e., his psychology--do not aim so much to describe scientifically the natural phenomenon of brain or mind--the manner by which an individual thinks thoughts and feels feelings--as they do to examine how humans arrive practically at critical judgments about the world of human affairs. Plato bears this out in the Gorgias when Socrates says that the art "which has to do with the soul [or psyche], I call politics" (Gorg 464b).

Plato's identification of psychology with ethical and political reason and action is developed throughout his other main work on rhetoric, Phaedrus. The key sentence there reads like this in its standard Englished version: "Since it is the function of speech to lead souls by persuasion, he who is to be a rhetorician must know the various forms of soul" (Phdr 271d). Englished as it is, the sentence suggests the theoretical and practical tasks of the rhetorician are to catalogue states of mind--forms of soul--so the orator can systematically manage various audiences in various ways to achieve the goal of persuasion. But to read the sentence thus is dangerous hermeneutics: solipsistic, in a way, as we read more ourselves than Plato. So let me make a bold assumption: Plato neither spoke English or wrote Latin, so even the Latinate term that governs this passage--persuasion--is misleading. For persuasion suggests sweetness and sweet talkers rather than people making judgments or giving reasons ethically or politically. In fact, the Greek derivative in English that is most closely related to Latinate "persuasion" is "hedonism." But there are no "hedonist" terms in Plato's Greek sentence; thus we can suspect that our translated phrase, "to lead souls by persuasion" isn't quite right--that Plato does not exactly believe the function of speech is to sweet talk the psyche into believing what we want it to believe. Stripping

away English connotations of persuasion and replacing them with a complex of Greek associations, we arrive at a different version of the sentence, one that does not roll so sweetly off the tongue, perhaps, but one that captures the complexity of what Plato is about:

> Since the condition of language power is to hit the mark right to attract the mind and understanding of the living (awakening souls from a death-like state), that person who desires to be a rhetorician, who desires to be fit for public discourse, who desires to compel or constrain by argument, must know (various) kinds of souls--i.e., particular states of mind and particular plans of action to reach reason and understanding.

Here we see Plato's rhetoric joined with the general enterprise of his philosophy to awaken souls into a state of critical consciousness, to enlighten cave-dwellers seduced by shadows and appearances. And we can see that what for Plato is a concern for psychagogia--literally, leading the soul--is a concern for "hitting the mark," a concern for speaking truthfully, honestly, and critically in order to lead souls to a place of understanding and judgment.

Aristotle

Such a rendering of Plato's rhetoric is perfectly consistent with the Aristotle's rhetoric. As a counterpart of dialectic and an offshoot of ethics and politics and with its end in judgment and action, Aristotelian rhetoric is similar in aim to Plato's. Also similar is Aristotle's concept of psychology.

For Aristotle rhetoric gives direction to speech, which is "designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and . . . right and . . . wrong"

(Politics, 1253a). The human being is at once zoon politikon, the political animal, and zoon logon, the language-using, account-giving, and reason-making animal, who acts towards the end of eudaimonia, living well.

Central to Aristotelian rhetoric are the three types of artistic proof--ethos, pathos, and logos. Together, the three types of proof explore how humans give reasons to one another so they can make judgments and act in reasonably human ways. Thus the basic difference between rhetorical proofs and logical or mathematical proofs is that rhetorical proofs acknowledge the ethical and emotional domain of human reason in ways that neither logic nor science does. All three types of rhetorical proof address understanding, but here I wish to focus on pathos, which centers around the psychological issue of the relation between emotions and understanding. For Aristotle, the rhetorician must understand how "opinions vary, according as men love or hate, are wrathful or mild, and things appear either altogether different, or different in degree" (Rhetoric 1377b). Consequently, the end of proof based on pathos is not to manipulate the feelings and emotions of the audience but rather to understand how emotions could affect the audience's judgment, to determine whether or not a particular emotion is appropriate for a particular circumstance.

In developing pathos as a method of proof, Aristotle conceives psychology in practical rather than clinical terms. Like Plato's rhetoric, Aristotle's is psychological in that it is concerned with leading the soul to a place of understanding where judgment and action are guided by living well, politically and ethically. Hence the rhetorician needs to consider responsibly how emotions affect judgment. Unlike discourse by the bloodless

religious fanatic or the dehumanized scientist, Aristotelian rhetoric does not deny the emotional dimension of human life and reason nor does it try to manipulate it. Instead it asks what is the appropriate emotional emphasis that will allow sound judgment, sound action.

Campbell

As George Kennedy asserts, "Campbell. . . . thinks of his work as directly linked to the classical tradition in rhetoric. . . . Campbell thus comes not to deny classical rhetoric, but to go beyond and fulfill understanding of it" (233-4). It is not difficult to see how such an assertion is made. Like Plato and Aristotle before him, the 18th-century rhetorician is preeminently concerned with the soul. Indeed, as Campbell states in the preface to his Philosophy of Rhetoric, the "object" of rhetoric is, "by the use of language, to operate on the soul of the hearer" (xliii). Now this really does not sound much different from Plato's standard Englished sentence that says "to lead souls by persuasion, . . . a rhetorician must know the various forms of soul." Campbell will simply use the power of scientific enlightenment to complete what was begun in classical darkness. Campbell's goals are the same as Plato's and Aristotle's--or are they? Where the psychology of Plato and Aristotle turns outward to judgments of ethical and political deliberation and action, Campbell's psychology turns inward, leaving the ethical and political world of human action for what Campbell calls the "new country" of the human mind and psychological behavior.

Campbell explicitly grounds his Philosophy of Rhetoric in the emergent enlightenment science of psychology, the science of human nature and mental

operations of the mind, a "new country" (li), Campbell believes, to be explored, sketched out, conquered. As Campbell states

> It is his purpose in this Work, on the one hand, to exhibit . . . a tolerable sketch of the human mind; and, . . . to disclose its secret movements, tracing its principal channels of perception and action, as near as possible, to their source: and, on the other hand, from the science of human nature, to ascertain with greater precision, the radical principles of that art, whose object it is, by the use of language, to operate on the soul of the hearer (xliii).

The metaphors at work here are telling. First there are those of the explorer-geographer claiming territory in the new country while tracing channels to their source. Second, there are those of the scientist who, concerned with precision, identifies an object found in nature and uses science to identify radical principles for establishing effective operations. Informing Campbell's philosophy from the outset is the ethos of Campbell's contemporary, Captain Cook, expanding at once the boundaries of knowledge and England.

Here then we have two basic paradigms of psychology: one classical, practical and concerned with action; the other modern, scientific and concerned with behavior.

Now both modern psychology and the business of composition have developed considerably in the two hundred years since Campbell presented The Philosophy of Rhetoric. But Campbell's agenda is really no different from the research project that governs composition today, especially in terms of process. Compositionalist practices derived from research in reading, for

example, begin in Campbellian desire for "radical principles" "ascertain[ed] with greater precision." And compositionalist practices derived from descriptions of the acts of composing--from looking at twelfth graders to interviewing Woody Allen--begin in Campbellian desire to "disclose [the mind's] secret movements, tracing its principal channels of perception and action, as near as possible to their source," and it really doesn't matter whether the researcher believes that source is determined privately or collectively, individually or socially. For compositionalists as diverse as Alexander Bain, I.A. Richards, E.D. Hirsch, or Louise Wetherbee Phelps have tended to look to the category of scientific psychology regardless of whether we conceptualize that scientific psychology in empiricist or hermeneutic terms. Directly or indirectly we live not so much in Plato's cave as Campbell's shadow.

Perhaps we should forget about the category of psychology all together since, in our culture, the term is firmly embedded in notions of science and its culture of description. A classical notion of psychology, a psychology of political and ethical action (as opposed to a modern psychology of scientifically interpreted behavior) is as foreign to us as, well, classical Greece. So let's not put ourselves in the absurd position of creating a classical ecology that would renegotiate the term "psychology." Instead, let's recast the problem, change the scene, toss out the baggage of psychology rather than unpack it, move from behavior to action, from scientific observation and participation to cultural work and engagement.

What might such a change of scene entail? A number of things come to mind--entire research programs might be abandoned, series upon series of

textbooks tossed aside--but what I wish to suggest in the remaining few minutes is that before anything else can change, concepts of the classroom as psychological arena would have to change. Current visions of classroom as receptacle or cocoon could no longer obtain. By receptacle I mean that sterile image of a class where students are always on the receiving end of a powerfully wielded shtick. Here developmental psychology does little more than determine tolerance: how much can be wielded at what level before student synapses frass and fizzle from diabolical doctors injecting truth in doses just this side of lethal? By cocoon I mean the other extreme: that cozy image of a class where, through a postmodern variation of ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny, students sit around socially constructing reality, at once democratically and epistemologically hip while ethnographically ensconced in their ecological context. Here social, developmental, and cognitive psychologies merge to affirm the isness of is with the becoming of becoming. Panglossian, now, decentered and without authority, the classroom becomes the democratically best of all epistemologically possible worlds. But as Alan Wolfe asks in a review of John Dewey and American Democracy, "To be a democrat in politics, must one also be a democrat in culture, in education and in knowledge? . . . it is at least plausible that highly undemocratic teaching methods may be more compatible with transmitting the knowledge necessary for democratic citizenship than an emphasis on communities of inquiry" (36).

If we have any concern for the relation between education and democracy, diversity, and empowerment, our question, then, might well be what knowledge of writing is necessary for such democratic participation? The problem with the cartoon classrooms drawn above, circumscribed by psychology and process, is that in neither one can we ask such a question. Democracy, diversity and

empowerment require conscious cultural work, but the assumptions governing both classrooms is that cultural work (in this case writing, or more perversely, the process of writing) entails a nondisrupted, non-critical continuation of nature (in this case the mental behavior of student writers, either physically, sociologically, or ethnographically determined): if we understand that nature, we can simply cultivate it. But culture is not agriculture. Cultural work is not so much the development of nature as it is the transformation of human action--that, after all, is what the root of education means--e ducare, to lead from--to move and be moved from one place to another, and thereby transformed in the way we act.

With such a meditation in mind, we can reconceive the classroom, not as a scene of ontogenetical recapitulation but as a scene of cultural engagement. Most of our students are victims of culture rather than transformational participants within it. Limited by institutional power structures that produce and impose culture at both global and local levels, our students are further limited not so much by technical illiteracy as by rhetorical naivete. Aristotelian now, we can energize our students' potentials as zoon logon, teaching them to raise questions about how a world of powerful, myriad discourses operate to shape them, remembering here that the final reason Aristotle gives for studying rhetoric is defense. And like Plato now, we must realize that such question-raising does not come naturally or easily, especially in a democracy such as ours that often identifies troublemakers as those who ask too many questions. Thus we can teach our students to be critical, to ask of discourse to what degree does it hit the mark--to what degree is the appearance proffered by images, flattery, talk, consistent with the reality of lived experience or the hope of imagined alternatives?

Such a classroom could have no room for the tyranny of process, for the very concept of process becomes absurd when through rhetorical action we become culturally engaged. Let me conclude, paradoxically, by invoking a psychologist to undo psychology. As John Warnock notes of Margaret Donaldson in Children's Minds, "children can indeed do much of what Piaget found they could not, when they are invited to act in a situation that makes sense" (18, emphasis added). Classrooms governed by notions of compositionalist behavior in general and process in particular often do not make sense to our students, nor should they. Let me make another bold assumption. For the most part, our students are neither pathological nor undeveloped, characteristics that psychology concerns itself with. But our students are not very adept at cultural action, at engaging their culture critically and transformationally, especially through discourse. Yet such critical engagement can make sense to our students, and it is certainly what we can teach them, indeed must teach them if we wish to make any serious claim to education at all, but we can do so only if we abandon altogether the presumption of psychology and the tyranny of process that limit our students to behavior at the expense of action.

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